Student Support Services in the Schools: Actual and Preferred Time Use of Psychoeducational Consultants and Social Workers

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Student Support Services in the Schools: Actual and Preferred Time Use of Psychoeducational Consultants and Social Workers

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Executive Summary

In Fall 1990, Student Support Services sent a Needs Assessment Survey to all elementary and secondary schools in the City of Toronto Board. The questionnaire was to be filled out by psychoeducational consultants, social workers, and principals in each school. A total of 350 questionnaires were returned from 113 schools in the board.

In the first section of the survey, psychoeducational consultants and social workers were given a list of work-related activities. They were then asked to fill in two pie graphs, indicating 1) the time they spent on these activities, and 2) the time they would prefer to spend on these activities. Principals completed four pie graphs showing actual and preferred time use for both psychoeducational consultants and social workers in their school.

Results indicate that psychoeducational consultants and social workers want to allocate their professional activities in much the same way as they are already doing. Psychoeducational consultants spend most of their time on IPRC-related assessment, school team, consultation, and assessment for classroom intervention. They want to continue using their time in this way, although they think somewhat less time should be spent on IPRC-related assessment. Principals, for the most part, agree with psychoeducational consultants' reported and preferred time use.

Social workers spend the most time on counselling, consultation, school team, and parent interviews, with counselling most important. They prefer to spend their time on these activities, but would prefer to allot more time than at present to some other activities. Principals agree with the importance of these four activities, although not with the order of priorities.

The greatest suggested change is in the time allocated to group programs. There is general agreement that group programs should take about 2 days a month of psychoeducational consultants' and social workers' time. This suggests that participants think group programs need about twice as much time as is currently allotted. Psychoeducational consultants and principals also think that more time should put aside for classroom intervention.

In the second section of the survey, participants comment on their current and anticipated professional needs. The comments tend to reinforce findings on time use. Participants are especially clear about increasing time devoted to group programs. They mention group programs most frequently of all the social work/psychology initiatives or needs in their schools this year. They cite it as the key preventative program that is being introduced or being

planned for the fall term. Psychoeducational consultants also emphasize classroom intervention.

However, educators and professionals in the survey are concerned that a lack of available time may hinder these and other initiatives. While positively endorsing the quality of professional work, many do not think there is enough time to meet all school requirements. Thus, participants want to put greater emphasis on group programs and other activities, but they are aware of obstacles to these initiatives.

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Introduction

In Fall 1990 Student Support Services sent a Needs Assessment Survey to elementary and secondary schools in the City of Toronto Board. The questionnaire was to be filled out by the psychoeducational consultants, social workers, and principals in each school.

A total of 350 questionnaires were returned. Almost all (99 percent) were from 113 schools in the Toronto Board:

- 117 questionnaires from psychoeducational consultants were returned. Psychoeducational consultants were given a list of 10 work-related activities: school team, ABC program, group programs, classroom intervention, consultation, IPRC-related assessment, assessment for classroom intervention, counselling, parent interviews; and "other". They were then asked to fill in pie graphs showing 1) the time they spent on these activities, and 2) the time they would prefer to spend on these activities.

- 120 questionnaires from social workers were returned. Social workers were given a list of 11 work-related activities: school team, group programs, community work, classroom intervention, consultation, attendance, parent interviews, multicultural services, counselling, special education support, and "other". They also filled in pie graphs to indicate the time spent on these activities, and the time they would prefer to spend on these activities.

- 113 questionnaires from principals were returned. Principals completed pie graphs to show the time they thought psychoeducational consultants, and social workers, spent on work-related activities, and how much time they would prefer to be spent on these activities.

Psychoeducational consultant, social worker and principal results from these questions are reported in **Part A: Time Use Analysis.**

All participants also completed a second section of the survey, where they answered a number of open-ended questions about their professional needs, both current and anticipated. Results are reported in **Part B: Assessment of Professional Needs.**

Part A: Time Use Analysis

I: Comparison of Time Spent and Time Preferred

Psychoeducational Consultants: Time Spent and Preferred

Activity	Time Spent* (%)	Approx. Days per Month#	Time Preferred@ (%)	Approx. Days per Month#	Change
IPRC–Related Assessment	28.5	6	19.0	4	-
School Team	18.0	3 1/2	17.9	3 1/2	=
Consultation	13.1	2 1/2	12.9	2 1/2	=
Assessment for Classroom Intervention	10.5	2	11.5	2	=
Parent Interviews	9.1	2	8.7	1 1/2	=
Counselling	8.8	2	9.7	2	=
Classroom Intervention	5.7	1	8.5	2	+
Group Programs	2.6	1/2	9.7	2	+
ABC Program	1.4	1/2	2.4	1/2	=

On average, psycheducational consultants spend most of their time (approximately 14 days per 20 day work month) on IPRC–Related Assessment, School Team, Consultation, and Assesssment for Classroom Intervention. They want to continue spending most of their time on these activities, although they think less should be devoted to IPRC–Related Access–ment: four days a month, rather than the six days a month used at present.

Psychoeducational consultants are also interested in spending more time on Classroom Inter vention (two days instead of one) and Group Programs (two days instead of a half).

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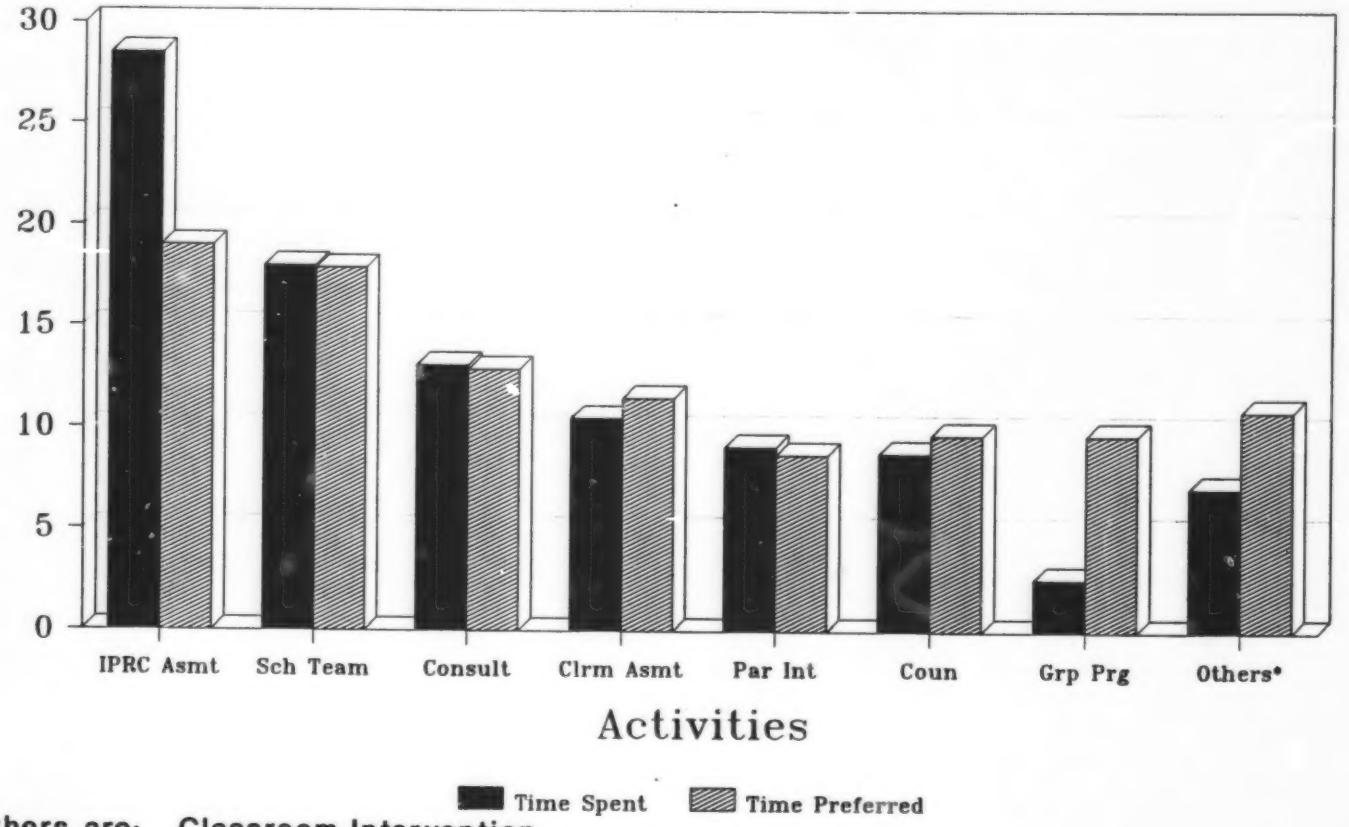
* Time Spent is the average response for percent of time spent on each activity
# Approx. Days/Month is the average Time Spent/Preferred based on a 20 day work month
@ Time Preferred is the average response for percent of time preferred for each activity

Psychoed. Consultants
Time Spent and Preferred



*Others are: Classroom Intervention
ABC Program

Principals on Psychoeducational Consultants: Time Spent and Preferred

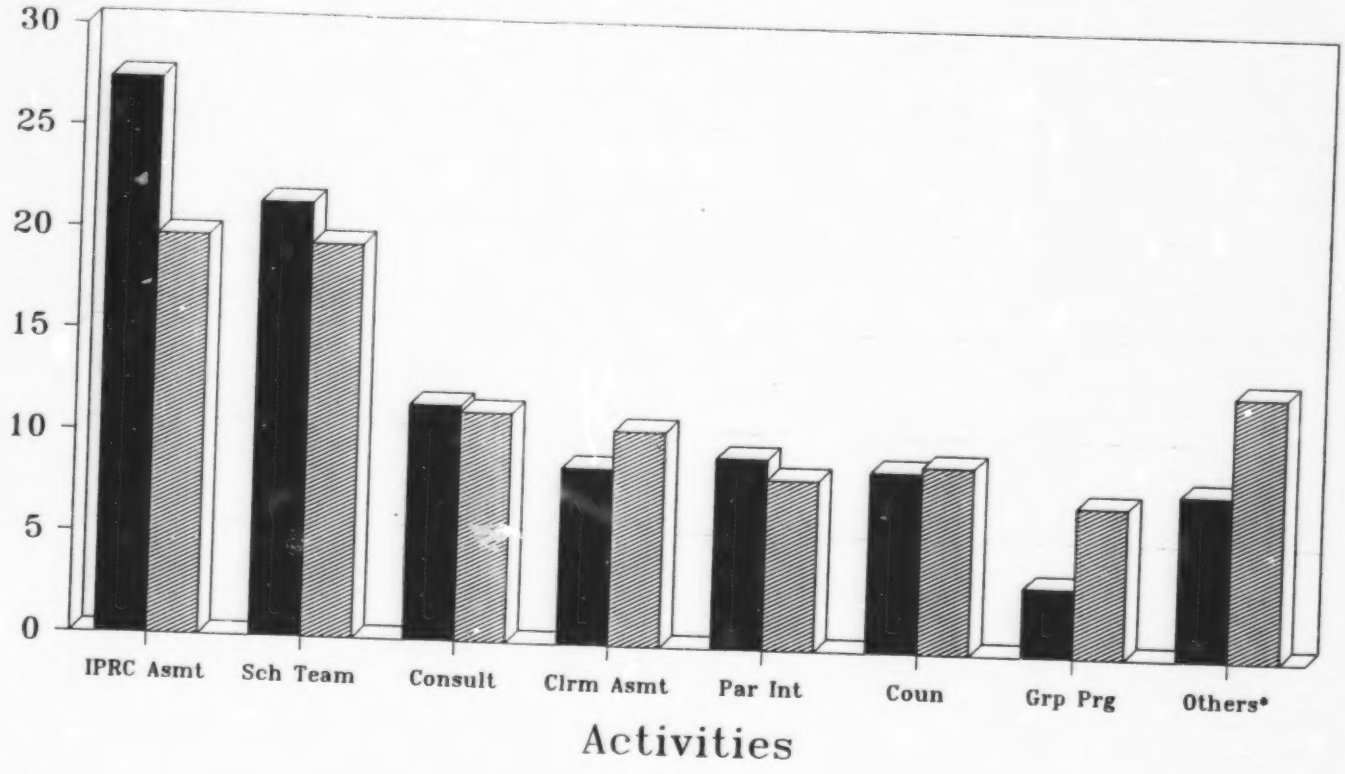
Activity	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
IPRC Related–Assessment	27.4	5 1/2	19.7	4	–
School Team	21.4		19.4		=
Consultation	11.6		11.3		=
Parent Interviews	9.4		8.4		=
Counselling	8.9		9.2		=
Assessment for Classroom Intervention	8.7		10.6		=
Classroom Intervention	5.2	1	7.9	1 1/2	+
Group Programs	3.4	1/2	7.4	1 1/2	+
ABC Program	2.9	1/2	5.1	1	+

Principals' perceptions of psychoeducational consultant time use are very similar to what psychoeducational consultants report—although principals do not think Assessment for Classroom Intervention takes as much time, or needs as much time, as do psychoeducational consultants.

Principals think IPRC–Related Assessment is the most time–intensive activity, and that it should be reduced to four days from five and a half days a month.

They also think Classroom Intervention should have a larger share of time, (one and a half instead of one day a month) as should Group Programs (one and a half instead of half a day).

Principals on Psychoed. Consultants Time Spent and Preferred



*Others are: Classroom Intervention
ABC Program

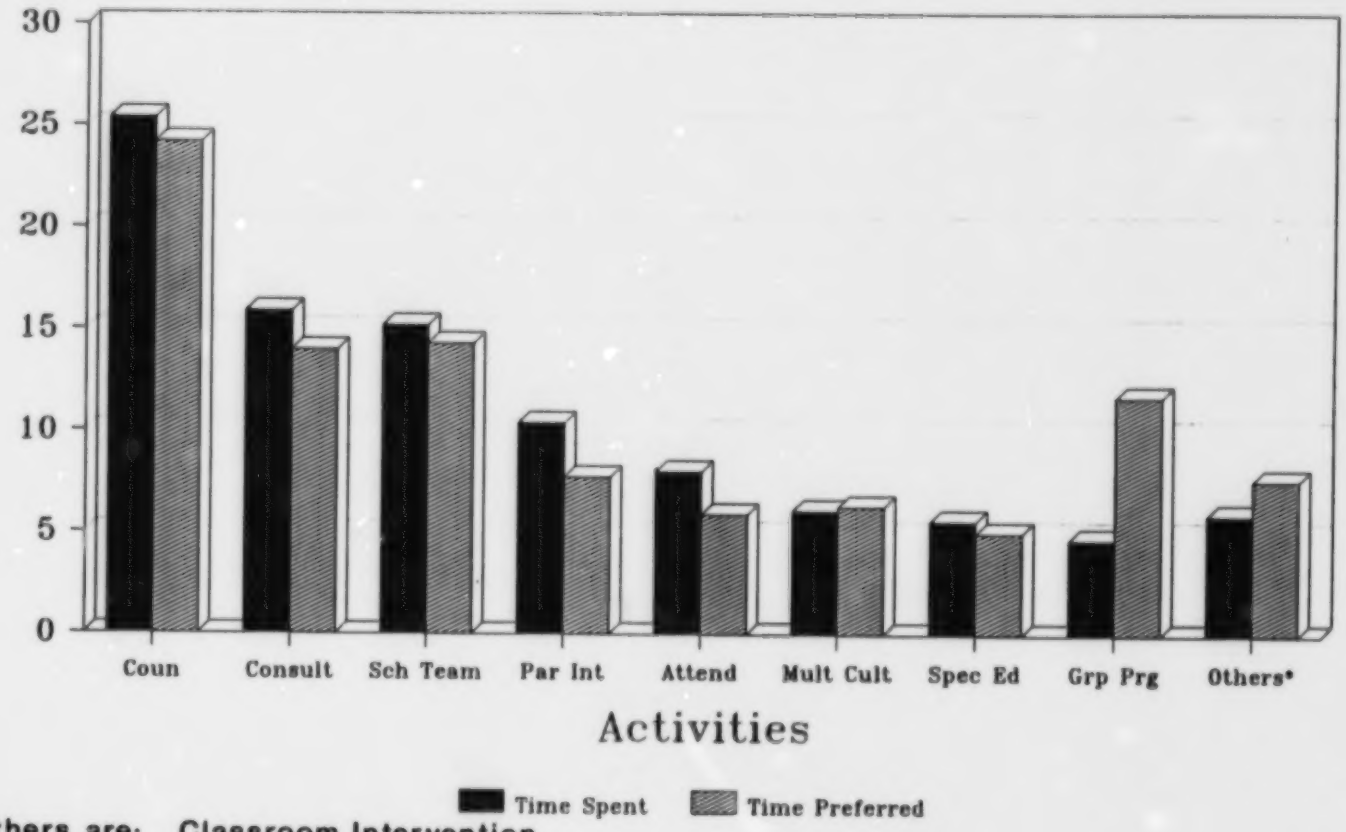
Social Workers:
Time Spent and Preferred

Activity	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Counselling	25.4	5	24.2	5	=
Consultation	15.9	3	14.0	3	=
School Team	15.2	3	14.3	3	=
Parent Interviews	10.4	2	7.7	1 1/2	-
Attendance	8.0	1 1/2	5.9	1	-
Multicultural Services	6.1	1	6.3	1	=
Special Education Support	5.6	1	5.0	1	=
Group Programs	4.7	1	11.7	2	+
Classroom Intervention	3.1	1/2	4.1	1/2	=
Community Work	2.8	1/2	3.5	1/2	=

On average, social workers spend most of their time on Counselling, Consultation, School Team, and Parent Interviews, with Counselling taking more time than any other activity. They prefer to spend their time on these activities, although they would prefer to spend a little less time on them (12 days a month instead of 13).

They think Group Programs should have a larger share--- two days a month rather than one.

Social Workers
Time Spent and Preferred



*Others are: Classroom Intervention
Community Work

Principals on Social Workers: Time Spent and Preferred

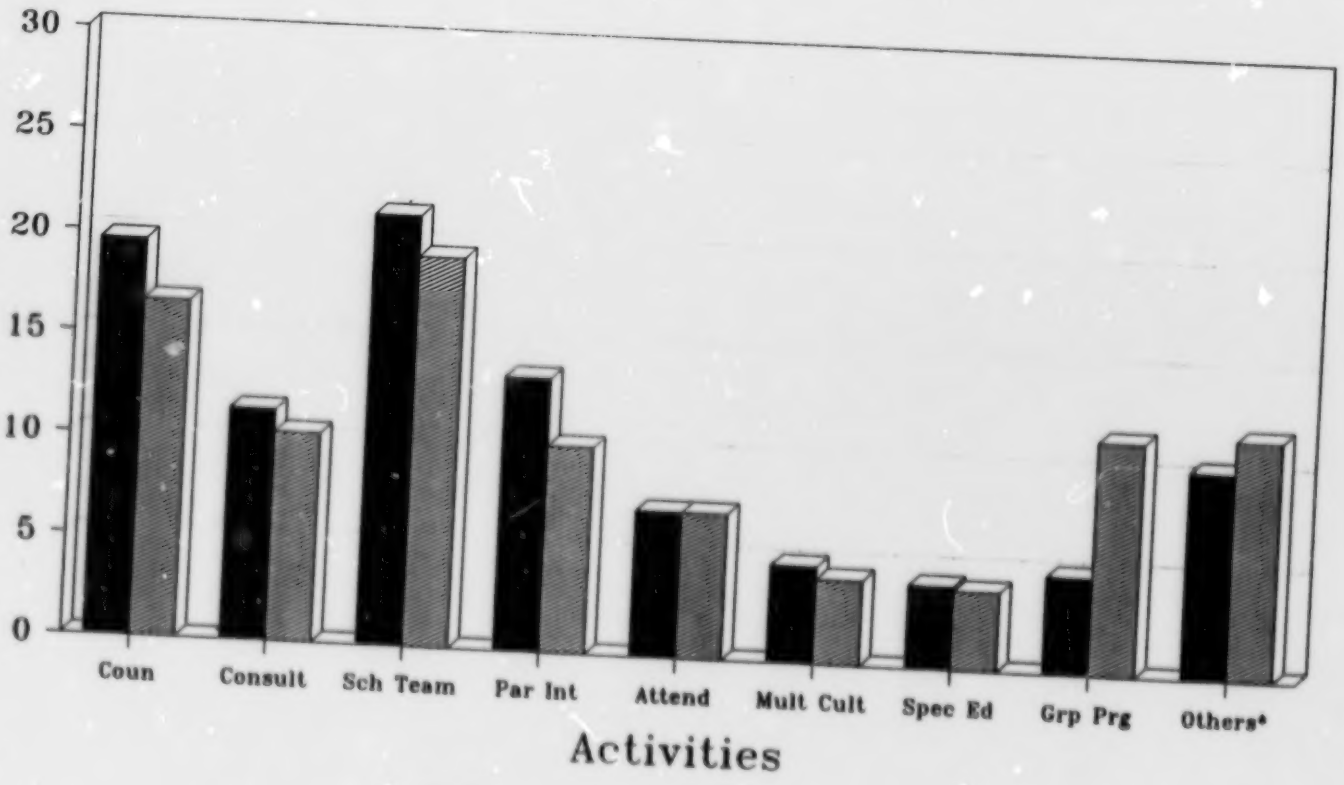
Activity	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
School Team	21.3		19.3		=
Counselling	19.6	4	16.6	3	-
Parent Interviews	13.5	3	10.2	2	-
Consultation	11.4		10.3		=
Attendance	7.2	1 1/2	7.2	1 1/2	=
Community Work	5.9		6.4		=
Multicultural Services	4.8		4.2		=
Group Programs	4.8	1	11.5	2	+
Classroom Intervention	4.3		5.4		=
Special Education Support	4.1		3.9		=

Principals' perceptions of social workers' time use are similar to social workers' self-perception, in that School Team, Counselling, Parent Interviews, and Consultation are the most time-consuming activities (although the order differs from how social workers rank these activities). Principals say these activities currently take up a total of 13 days a month, but should take 12 days.

Principals rank Community Work higher than do Social Workers, who rank it lowest of all 10 activities. Principals think it should take oneday a month while social workers would devote half a day to it.

Like social workers, they think Group Programs should have a larger share-- two days a month rather than one.

Principals on Social Workers Time Spent and Preferred



*Others are: Classroom Intervention
Community Work

II: Activities Common to Psychoed. Consultants and Social Workers

School Team:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	18.0	3 1/2	17.9	3 1/2	=
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	21.4	4	19.4	4	=
Social Workers	15.2	3	14.3	3	=
Principals on Social Workers	21.3	4	19.3	4	=

In all cases, there was a close relationship between the time spent on School Teams, and the time respondents thought should be sent on School Teams-- which amounts to three to four days per month, or 15-20% of the time. School Team is ranked as the primary, secondary or tertiary activity by psychoeducational consultants, social workers, and principals, in time spent and time preferred. Principals tend to make slightly higher estimates (four days a month) compared to professionals (three to three and a half days a month).

Consultation:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	13.1	2 1/2	12.9	2 1/2	=
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	11.6	2	11.3	2	=
Social Workers	15.9	3	14.0	3	=
Principals on Social Workers	11.4	2	10.3	2	=

Consultation should take two to three days a month, or 10–15% of professionals' time. Principals prefer the lower figures, professionals the higher figures.

Counselling:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	8.8	2	9.7	2	=
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	8.9	2	9.2	2	=
Social Workers	25.4	5	24.2	5	=
Principals on Social Workers	19.6	4	16.6	3	-

Counselling is a two day a month activity (10% of time) for psychoeducational consultants. There is agreement that counselling takes a bigger share of social workers' time— but there is a large discrepancy over how much more time. Principals say around 15%, or three days a month; social workers say 25%, or five days a month.

Group Programs:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	2.6	1/2	9.7	2	+
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	3.4	1/2	7.4	1 1/2	+
Social Workers	4.7	1	11.7	2	+
Principals on Social Workers	4.8	1	11.5	2	+

There is general agreement that group programs should take two days a month, or 10 % of professionals' time-- at least twice as much time as they presently do.

Parent Interviews:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	9.1	2	8.7	1 1/2	=
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	9.4	2	8.4	1 1/2	=
Social Workers	10.4	2	7.7	1 1/2	-
Principals on Social Workers	13.5	3	10.2	2	-

There is general agreement that parent interviews should take about 8% of professionals' time, or about one and a half days per month.

Class Intervention:
Time Spent and Preferred

Professional	Time Spent (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Time Preferred (%)	Approx. Days/Month	Change
Psychoed. Consultants	5.7	1	8.5	2	+
Principals on Psychoed. Consultants	5.2	1	7.9	1 1/2	+
Social Workers	3.1	1/2	4.1	1/2	=
Principals on Social Workers	4.3	1/2	5.4	1	=

Classroom interventions should take one to two days a month, or 5–10% of professionals' time. The higher figures are for psychoeducational consultants; the lower figures are for social workers.

Summary: Time Use Analysis

Psychoeducational consultants and social workers want to allocate their time to professional activities in much the same way they are already doing. Principals' appraisal of time use is similar to professionals' self-reporting, which tends to indicate administrative approval-- or at least recognition-- of professional priorities. There are, however, some differences.

Psychoeducational consultants spend most of their time on IPRC-related assessment, school team, consultation, and assessment for classroom intervention. They want to continue using their time in this way, although they think less should be allocated to IPRC-related assessment. Principals, for the most part, agree with psychoeducational consultants' reported and preferred time use.

Social workers spend the most time on counselling, consultation, school team, and parent interviews, with counselling most important. They prefer to spend their time on these activities, although not as much as at present. Principals agree with the importance of these four activities, although not with the order of priorities. They think counselling and consultation take less time, and should take less time, than do social workers; they also think school team and parent interviews take more time, and should take more time. Such discrepancies are understandable considering the perspectives of social work and school administration; they should not, in fact, detract from the overall agreement between time spent and time preference.

The greatest suggested change is in the time allocated to group programs. There is general agreement that group programs should take two days a month, or about 10% of professionals' time. This suggests that professionals think group programs need about twice as much time as is currently allotted.

Psychoeducational consultants and principals also think consultants should spend half to one day more on classroom intervention than they do at present.

Part B. Assessment of Professional Needs

In this section of the survey, participants comment on their current and their anticipated professional needs.

For answers to each open-ended question, a few key categories emerge which clearly define the needs across school families and the system, and it is these needs that are reported. Other minor needs did emerge but are only marginally endorsed, are confounded with major needs, or can be considered artifacts of the survey design. Due to their inconsistency across schools and/or their low endorsement, these minor needs are not reported.

I. Meeting School Needs

Full question:
"Have your school's needs in regards to delivery of Psychological or Social Work Services been met this year? (This question is not to reflect on the performance of individuals.)"

	Social Workers (%)	Psychoed. Consultants (%)	Principals (%)
Yes	36.7	37.6	43.4
No	30.0	26.5	40.7
Undecided/ Did not answer	33.3	35.9	15.9

More participants agree than disagree that their school needs were met by the two services. Many (29% of the total sample) did not answer, or were undecided.

Meeting School Needs:
Elementary and Secondary Principals

	Elementary Principals (%)	Secondary Principals (%)	Combined (%)
Yes	46.5	33.3	43.4
No	39.5	44.4	40.7
Undecided/ Did not answer	14.0	22.2	15.9

Secondary principals are less likely to think their school needs have been met than are elementary principals, although the difference is not statistically significant.

Meeting School Needs: Open-ended Comments

All three groups-- psychoeducational consultants, social workers, and principals-- positively endorse the quality of work being done, but are negative about the amount of time available to meet the large number of school demands. As a result, "crisis work" is thought to take precedence.

Psychoeducational Consultant:

> "The crisis needs of the school and some of the priority needs are being met. However, some of the priority needs and less urgent needs do not get met due to time."

Social Worker:

> "The school has had to prioritize its needs to meet the demands that were most pressing-- crisis focused. Therefore because of the lack of time it has been unable to concentrate on the preventative model in the delivery of service."

Principal:

> "Needs were prioritized-- High priority needs (reactions) were met. Medium priority needs (prevention) were not met-- eg. group programs, to work with groups of parents/adolescents."

II. Special Initiatives or Needs

Full Question:

"What special initiatives or needs do you see for psychology and social work in your school for the 1990-1991 academic year? (ie. needs of students and community, needs for special skills, etc.)"

Elementary Panel

All elementary panel respondents strongly endorse the need for group work. Group work is seen to address a broad range of concerns-- among them parenting, social skills, specific learning needs, and behavioral concerns.

Classroom interventions are strongly endorsed for psychoeducational consultants, both by consultants and principals. Less strongly endorsed but still clearly represented are multicultural initiatives for social workers; and school team and professional development initiatives for both professions.

Secondary Panel

Group initiatives are strongly endorsed by all respondents for the secondary panel, with emphasis on behavioral and social skills issues. To a lesser extent, classroom intervention initiatives for psychoeducational consultants, and multicultural initiatives for social workers are also endorsed.

Psychoeducational Consultant

- "group work with deprived/acting-out/behavior problem students"
- "more in-class interventions"
- "more individual short-term counselling with family/student"

Social Worker

- "more group work regarding parenting skills and with children regarding social skills"
- "more continuous social work with home and students"
- "workshops with school staff regarding development of skills, working with groups, and regarding crisis intervention"
- "high percentage of population are E.S.L. with need for increasing parental involvement, self-esteem building, parenting skills"

Principal

- "more involvement in classroom work, help teacher to modify program and meet pupil's identified needs."
- "individual counselling a priority-- group counselling should be extended"

III. Impediments to Above Initiatives

Full question:

"What are the system impediments you see that might prevent you undertaking the above initiatives."

Respondents strongly cite the lack of available time as a major impediment to new initiatives; to a lesser extent, space considerations and paperwork/recording considerations are also mentioned. Principals note the lack of consistency of assignment as a major impediment.

Psychoeducational Consultant

- "Time constraints-- limited amount of time per week for two schools."
- "Staff changes ie. Psychological. This is my first year in a school and a change of personnel at this time would disrupt a fairly well-functioning team."

Social Worker

- "Time- one-half day per week is simply insufficient to meet delivery of service requests."
- "very limited facilities-- no office, no space for group programming."
- "Whatever is available is shared to multi-purpose and frequently unavailable."

Principal

- "Insufficient time allocations."
- "difficulty scheduling Social Work and Psychological Consultant on the same day at the school."
- "amount of time spent by Psychoeducational Consultants on reports which are perhaps too comprehensive."
- "staff changes-- don't destroy our teams and have us go back to square one."

IV. Types of Preventative Programs in Place or Planned for Fall Term

Full question:

"The Student Services Review has adopted a preventative service model as one of its key strategies.

In this context, what types of preventative programs do you have in place, or are planning for the fall term?"

Secondary panel respondents (psychoeducational consultants, social workers, and principals) most frequently cite group programs as the key preventative program being planned for the fall term.

Elementary panel respondents also cite group programs as the predominant preventative program. As well, they note school team and classroom intervention as additional initiatives for prevention.

Psychoeducational Consultant

- "strengthen school team with a view to in-class changes."
- "study skills group program planned for grade five."

Social Worker

- "addressing adolescent issues with senior school population."
- "parenting group to enhance effective discipline"
- "tutoring program to assist E.S.L. population and children who need remediation."

Principal

- "group counselling"
- "individual counselling and inservice conferencing with parents."
- "planning with the Local School team and the classroom teacher remedial classroom programs to help students with learning problems."

Summary: Assessment of Professional Needs

In the second section of the survey, participants comment on their current and anticipated professional needs. These comments, on the whole, tend to reinforce findings on time use.

Participants are especially clear in increasing the importance of group programs. When asked what initiatives or needs they see as useful for their school in 1990-1991, all subgroups in both elementary and secondary panels point to group programs or initiatives. Such programs are suggested to address a broad range of concerns: social skills (elementary and secondary), behavior concerns (elementary and secondary), parenting (elementary) and specific learning needs (elementary).

Both elementary and secondary panel respondents cite group programs as the key preventative program that is being introduced in their school, or is planned for the fall term. Participants also emphasize classroom intervention by psychoeducational consultants as another key program (replicating what is said in the time use questions).

However, participants appear to be concerned that a lack of available time may hinder these and other initiatives. More participants agreed than disagreed that their school needs had been met this year in psychology or social services. Yet the proportion of 'satisfied' participants is below half of the total sample, when the under of people who were undecided or did not answer is included. Open-ended comments do not show dissatisfaction, but a concern about time. All groups positively endorse the quality of professional work; nonetheless, many think there is not enough time to meet all school requirements. They also cite lack of adequate time as a major impediment to implementing initiatives (along with problems of space and paperwork).

Thus, participants want to put greater emphasis on group programs and other activities, but they are aware of serious obstacles to these initiatives.